



Kimberly A. Foster  
Executive Director

# LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

**COMMISSIONERS:**  
CAROL O. BIONDI  
PATRICIA CURRY  
ANN FRANZEN  
SUSAN F. FRIEDMAN  
HELEN A. KLEINBERG, CHAIR  
DR. LA-DORIS MCCLANEY  
REV. CECIL L. MURRAY  
SANDRA RUDNICK, VICE CHAIR  
STACEY SAVELLE  
ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW, VICE CHAIR  
DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS  
TRULA J. WORTHY-CLAYTON

## UNAPPROVED MINUTES

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The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **September 17, 2007**, in room 739 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

### COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Carol O. Biondi  
Ann Franzen  
Susan F. Friedman  
Helen A. Kleinberg  
Dr. La-Doris McClaney  
Rev. Cecil L. Murray  
Sandra Rudnick  
Adelina Sorkin  
Trula J. Worthy-Clayton

### COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Patricia Curry  
Stacey Savelle  
Dr. Harriette F. Williams

### APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda for the September 17, 2007, meeting was unanimously approved.

### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the September 4, 2007, special meeting were unanimously approved.

### CHAIR'S REPORT

- Chair Kleinberg noted with sorrow the recent passing of Judge Paul Boland, an advocate for children and families who was instrumental in the creation of the Department of Children and Family Services. Judge Boland was also responsible for significant

changes in the dependency court system overall, and helped design the Children's Court as a family-friendly facility. He will be missed.

- Last year's planning process for the community services and supports component of the Mental Health Services Act required an enormous effort on the part of Commissioners Curry and Biondi, as well as others, to ensure that funds would be spent on transitional living and for probation youth. The Commission was not a formal 'stakeholder' in the process, but its ad hoc lobbying was ultimately successful.

This year, the Department of Mental Health has invited the Commission to participate as a voting member in planning for the MHSA's prevention and early intervention component, which is once again expected to be intense. A delegate and alternate must be named prior to the stakeholders' orientation meeting on September 20. Commissioner Biondi stressed the importance of these positions with regard to advocating for children, since adult advocates have already reduced the proportion of prevention dollars for young people from 75 percent to 49 percent.

Commissioner Curry has expressed interest in serving as the MHSA delegate, but may not be able to attend all the meetings. Commissioners interested in serving as alternates were encouraged to give their names to staff today, and Chair Kleinberg will try to attend this week's orientation meeting.

- Commissioner McClaney presented one nomination for the Commission's chair position and three nominations for its two vice chair seats:

Chair:	Adelina Sorkin
Vice Chair:	Ann Franzen
	Stacey Savelle
	Trula Worthy-Clayton

Chair Kleinberg urged all Commissioners to attend on October 1, when the vote on this slate will occur, and Commissioner McClaney thanked executive director Kim Foster for her help in contacting Commissioners while she was out of the country.

- As part of a plan to enhance opportunities for foster and probation youth, Angelica Sanchez, a senior at the University of Southern California, began interning in the Commission office last week and will be in on Thursdays and Fridays. Ms. Sanchez, a former foster youth who is earning her bachelor's degree in public policy, will assist with the Commission's annual report, data on child fatalities, and other projects.
- Over the next two weeks, the Commission office's priority will be the annual report, and a draft will go to all Commissioners once it is ready. Chair Kleinberg encouraged committee chairs to submit their work by the end of the month.

## **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

- DCFS director Trish Ploehn reported that the internal investigation into last week's death of a baby at a skid row shelter must be completed before details of the case can be made public. She suggested that this morning's planned discussion of emergency response and command post protocols instead take place at the child fatality review meeting scheduled for tomorrow. Chair Kleinberg asked Commissioners who attend that meeting to relay information to Ms. Foster so the appropriate agenda items may inform Commissioners about these topics at their next meeting.
- With regard to the previously presented 'fast facts' document, Ms. Ploehn suggested that a summary of her follow-up report—an 18-page document breaking out family language statistics by office—also be covered at the child fatality meeting.
- The \$25.3 million budget gap projected for the department has been eliminated through severe cuts in services and supplies for internal staff, shifting line-item allocations, and identifying other funding sources. The supplemental budget that will go before the Board of Supervisors for approval on September 25 will ask for no additional county dollars. Ms. Ploehn expressed appreciation to the Chief Executive Office and its budget staff for their help in making these adjustments.

A minimum of 306 vacant personnel items were considered as possible cuts, but once a vacant item is lost, it is extremely difficult to get it back. All the human services aide positions recently approved for hiring by the Board of Supervisors remain uncurtailed, as are all social worker positions. With the Title IV-E waiver plan calling for an increase in visitations with parents and siblings, human services aides will serve as permanency assistants, monitoring visits or taking care of other tasks so that social workers may monitor visits. Research shows that regular, significant visitation is a vital factor in family reunification, and human services aides are part of a more user-friendly department.

- A motion passed by the Board of Supervisors some years ago stated that the prevention of child abuse and neglect cannot be the responsibility solely of the Department of Children and Family Services, and the Board directed all county health and human service agencies to engage community partners in a planning process for a prevention initiative. At the same time, DCFS launched an internal planning process for its own prevention effort. As a result, two versions of the HST prevention initiative—Healthier Communities, Stronger Families, Thriving Children—will be rolled out simultaneously in the next month. They are designed to move in concert to enter into families' lives within their communities before harm occurs, to prevent that harm.

The countywide version of HST is scheduled to go to the Board for approval tomorrow, and will request \$1.5 million for the first year of what may become a longer-range plan. It focuses on four communities—Lancaster, Florence/Firestone, Pacoima, and Wilmington—funding community-based agencies to shift the government oversight of prevention efforts to a community oversight bolstered by a government foun-

dation, excluding government from being involved in people's lives. The choice to concentrate in only a few neighborhoods was made partly for financial reasons, and partly because the project is intended as a pilot for a larger effort.

The DCFS version of HST, a one-year demonstration project, is funded by \$5 million set aside by the department from 2005–2006 family preservation funds, and will go before the Board for approval on October 2. It uses lead agencies in all eight SPAs that were identified through a Request for Initiative process done through DCFS's community-based programs division. SPAs will receive between \$300,000 and \$1 million each, calculated via a formula that considers the number of children in the SPA, the number of detainments, the number of slots available for out-of-home care, and other factors. An immediate start-up date is being requested for the effort, and agencies are gearing up to begin directly upon Board approval, since at least three months for staff hiring, training, etc., is needed before the program is fully functional. The department is empowering contracted agencies to determine the needs of individual communities and to decide on a particular focus to get the most from the admittedly small number of dollars involved, which cannot possibly serve an entire SPA.

Casey Family Programs has volunteered to perform the evaluation of the DCFS effort, and \$250,000 has been set aside from the \$5 million for additional evaluation tools and processes. If those are not needed, that money will be fed into the eight lead agency contracts prior to the end of the year-long project.

### **CHILD FATALITY COMMITTEE REPORT**

Approximately half the child fatalities in Los Angeles County over the last few months have been gang-related, and several were youth who had 'crossed over' from DCFS (under the jurisdiction of the dependency court) to the Probation Department and the delinquency system. A blanket order issued by the juvenile court in 2002 waived confidentiality rules for the Commission with regard to dependency court cases, allowing Commissioners to review individual DCFS cases in which children have died or been seriously injured, for the purpose of evaluating departmental procedures and practices and recommending systemic changes. Commissioner Friedman would like to see the Commission request a similar blanket order so that delinquency cases in which children have died might also be reviewed.

During the ensuing discussion, Commissioners noted that:

- Reviews should be requested for cases in which youth have had any prior contact with DCFS, whether or not they were formally detained or dually supervised.
- If only the court case is requested, family information and other case notes from the Probation file may not be included.
- Records from the time of death may not show that a youth was on probation, especially if he or she was AWOL from suitable placement, for instance. It is unlikely that gang-affiliated youth would be unknown to Probation, but a database of names and birthdates exists for immediate identification.

**Commissioner Friedman moved that the Commission request a blanket order from the juvenile court allowing Commissioners to review cases in which children who have had prior contact with DCFS and the Probation Department have died or been seriously injured. Commissioner Biondi seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved.** County Counsel will assist in drafting the Commission's request.

Commissioner Friedman asked about wording at the bottom of child fatality reports indicating that DCFS's "critical incident/child fatality section is tracking deaths of such nature." Ms. Ploehn said that the department does keep statistics, and will find out if other information is gathered as well.

Commissioners asked Probation representative Andrea Gordon for a review of the Probation Department's processes and protocols upon a child's death.

#### **DCFS STAFFING PRESENTATION**

As part of a multi-meeting look at departmental staffing, Claudine Crank distributed information on DCFS clerical positions, including the number, classification, and vacancy rates of budgeted positions as of June 2007, and the average months in the pay-class, average years of service, and average age of clerical support employees as of September 10. Positions added as a result of the Board's adoption of the revised Katie A. corrective action plan were not reflected in these documents.

On the whole, vacancy rates are acceptable. Hiring lists administered by the Department of Human Resources are used by all county departments, and competition is keen for qualified candidates. Particularly with entry-level positions, turnover often occurs through employee promotions. In other classifications, slots may be few or advancement opportunities limited, and employees may tend to stay for longer periods.

With regard to the newly created human services aide positions, a paraprofessional classification, Ms. Crank reported that 150 of the 200 slots are now filled. Because of the job's innovative nature, recruitment has been difficult in spite of the number of clerical employees who applied to move up into these positions. Many candidates didn't fully understand what they were applying for, and declined the job when it was offered. In addition, 892 applicants did not meet the position's minimum requirements, 166 failed the written test, and a number failed the standard psychological test or the LiveScan criminal background check. Because human services aides will be used extensively in family visitations, Chair Kleinberg asked for information about the languages they speak; Ms. Crank promised that information, along with data on salaries.

For future meetings, Commissioners expressed interest in a general DCFS workforce profile and hearing about overall staffing issues being experienced within the department—how new initiatives are affecting workloads, tensions between different generations of staff, the extent to which inexperienced staff are encountering problems, and so on. Getting individuals interested in social service jobs can be challenging, and many county departments are having trouble recruiting staff. Commissioners will develop a list of specific questions to be passed to departmental liaison Susan Jakubowski.

## **AB 129 PRESENTATION**

In 2005, state legislation went into effect allowing counties to develop protocols designating certain children as having dual status in the dependency and delinquency systems, under Welfare and Institutions Code section 241.1. In Los Angeles County, a one-year pilot of these protocols began in May 2007 in two courtrooms in the Pasadena delinquency court, with partners that include DCFS, Probation, the Department of Mental Health, judicial officers, the Learning Rights Law Center, dependency attorneys, the District Attorney's office, Public Counsel, County Counsel, the Public Defender's office, and the Alternate Public Defender. No separate funding stream has been mandated for the program, which uses existing Title IV-E funds for the out-of-home placement of youth. A flowchart overview of how the dual-status protocols function was distributed.

DCFS youth often 'cross over' into the delinquency system because of behavioral and mental health issues. In the pilot, a multidisciplinary team—DCFS, Probation, DMH, and an educational liaison—makes sure that each child receives appropriate mental health screenings and services, as well as assistance with educational issues. Assessment tools include the Los Angeles Risk and Resiliency Check-up (LARRC), the eight-page DMH assessment document, and any existing structured decision-making assessments conducted by the case-carrying social worker. Because of time constraints associated with delinquency court dates, the team cannot always coordinate with team decision-making conferences, but it does use a group decision-making matrix in assessing information about the youth from the DCFS computer system (CWS/CMS), school records, mental health histories, family and caregiver interviews, arrest records, and so on.

The overarching goals for this collaborative work are better treatment services, fewer crossover youth, and less recidivism. For individuals, decreases in juvenile hall use, inpatient hospitalizations, and placement changes are also intended, along with improved completions of probation conditions such as restitution and community service. System-wide, the program is designed to reduce section 602 dispositions, increase dismissals and informal probation outcomes, improve access to substance abuse treatment, base probation supervision on risk level, and increase the use of lower levels of care.

Of the 14 referrals to the multidisciplinary team since May, nine are set for trial or are recent referrals, and five have proceeded to disposition:

- Three youth received six months of court-ordered probation in out-of-home care or relative care (not as a ward of the court).
- One petition was sustained in adjudication; the youth was not declared a delinquent ward, but could be upon another violation.
- One youngster was sent to suitable placement.

After disposition, more contact between the youth's probation officer and social worker is occurring, and three cases have held meetings with youth and their caregivers. (When mentors are appropriate for this group of individuals, Commissioner Worthy-Clayton knows of an organization in Pasadena that can help.)

Referrals are being received from placements, legal guardianships, and family homes; the majority of youth are nondetained at the beginning of the process. If they are detained, timelines for assessments are necessarily shorter. Children's attorneys may deny the team permission to interview the youth directly, or may proscribe questions in certain areas, but in general children's attorneys have been very cooperative. Public defenders and Children's Law Center attorneys were included in the two-week training prior to the pilot's launch, and the one alternate public defender involved has trained all her attorneys. Lara Holtzman from the Alliance for Children's Rights suggested that attorneys participating in the pilot be invited to present to the Commission on their experiences and what changes in disposition they are seeing.

Commissioner Biondi asked if any participating youth were previously involved in the START (Start Taking Action Responsibly Today) unit, another multidisciplinary effort dissolved last spring. Although that information has not been formally tracked, Lisa Parrish believes that staff would be aware if that were the case. One criterion for participation in the Pasadena pilot is a new petition in delinquency court, but some youngsters in the START unit might not have gotten to that stage. Ms. Parrish promised further information on the tracking of START unit participants.

Each of the pilot cases that have proceeded to disposition have involved mental health issues to some degree, according to Michael Malkin, DMH's director of juvenile court mental health services. He did not have all the details, but all the youngsters had histories of complicated family dynamics, exhibiting poor impulse control and poorly controlled emotional reactions. They required substantial mental health services, including individual psychotherapy and work with their families; most also required medication. Part of the multidisciplinary team's analysis looks at the mental health services youth have received while in DCFS to determine whether they were adequate and appropriate. The majority of referred youth are coming from high-level group home placements, RCL 10 and above, and the team received training on evidence-based practices last Friday so members could make better recommendations about treatment services in placement.

All prescriptions for psychotropic medication are approved and renewed by the juvenile court every six months, and all those written for program participants are also reviewed by the multidisciplinary team. If the child is not placed at home, his or her social worker bears the responsibility of monitoring drug effects, and Vice Chair Rudnick urged a closer watch, since the ramifications of the wrong drug or the wrong dosage can be damaging, and six months is a long time. Young people often refuse to take psychotropic medication, or may discontinue its use during periods in which they are AWOL.

Dr. Denise Herz from Cal State L.A.'s School of Criminal Justice and Criminalistics is performing the evaluation of the pilot project, which aims to discover:

- Which offenders are getting which disposition, by demographics (race, gender, and age, at a minimum) and characteristics?
- What is the impact of attorney type on the child's receiving a DMH evaluation, and on disposition overall?

- What is the impact of the multidisciplinary team's recommendations on disposition?
- What is the impact of the multidisciplinary team on net widening? When does it occur and under what conditions?
- What types of services are youth receiving as compared to the types of services they need?
- How long does it take to receive a response from attorneys on DMH evaluations? What types of responses are most likely to be received?

Using a seven-page data collection tool similar to that used for the evaluation of the START unit, Dr. Herz is collecting data on 25 cases referred to the multidisciplinary team and, as a control group, on 25 cases referred to 241.1 units outside of Pasadena during the same timeframe, matching the two sets of cases for prior offense and possibly for gender. In addition to the points outlined above, Dr. Herz hopes to capture social outcomes such as improvements in educational achievement and placement stability, the extent to which evidence-based practices are used in treatment, the types of services received by youth and their families following case disposition, and whether those services match risk and need. Although the evaluation itself is unfunded, Dr. Herz has committed to follow the two study groups for as long as DCFS and Probation continue to give her data on them. She expects a preliminary report within nine to twelve months.

The emphasis on evidence-based practices is of particular importance, since the family history of most crossover youth is dire, and as many as 20 percent have no family history at all documented in their case files. With no families to return to, they continue to end up in group homes, a 'placement of last resort' that can often contribute to their problems. Dr. Herz suspects that trends uncovered by the evaluation will reveal that youth do much better in facilities using evidence-based models of care. Differences in diagnoses before and after treatment should also be apparent; since the numbers involved in the study are so small, tracking and analysis can be done by hand if necessary.

In answer to Chair Kleinberg's inquiry about taking the Pasadena pilot to scale county-wide, Trish Ploehn said that the Title IV-E waiver allows the department a new flexibility in funding programs that are proven effective for children and families. As other programs are identified that are not producing improved outcomes, monies can be shifted to those that are. Additionally, as outcomes improve overall, savings will accrue that can be reinvested in successful efforts.

One advantage of an unfunded pilot project, Dr. Herz noted, is that the improved cooperation and relationships between departments can change policy—approaches to child welfare across the nation show that the most effective strategies involve building relationships. In that spirit, the Child Welfare League of America, which facilitated the planning effort for the Pasadena pilot, will issue a report identifying its obstacles and successes that should help work through some of the challenges inherent in taking it to scale.



**PUBLIC COMMENT**

- Michelle McKinney from Public Counsel briefly described a program that grooms foster youth for community development internships, asking if Commissioners were interested in meeting with the woman who runs it.
- Ms. McKinney also made Commissioners aware of six transition-age youth she knows who have been killed since January, some of whom were living in transitional housing and some of whom were eligible for independent living program benefits. In all cases, DCFS and Los Angeles County have declined to pay for funeral arrangements, and the young people have been buried as indigents after friends have solicited private donations. She urged the county to track and care for the youth it serves.

**MEETING ADJOURNED**